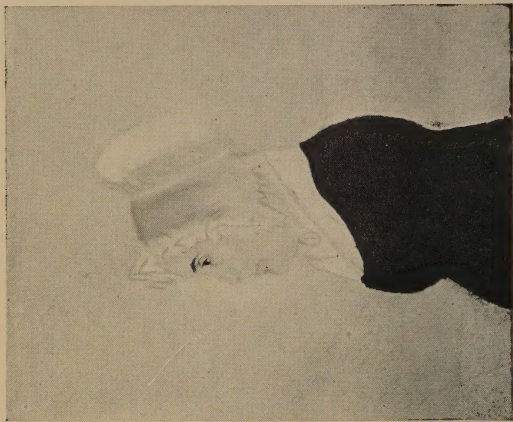


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JAMES SANFORD ELLSWORTH
NEW ENGLAND MINIATURIST
FREDERIC FAIRCHILD SHERMAN



JAMES SANFORD ELLSWORTH



Nos. 1 AND 2. MR. AND MRS. RUFUS WINTHROP

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JAMES SANFORD ELLSWORTH
A NEW ENGLAND MINIATURE PAINTER

By
FREDERIC FAIRCHILD SHERMAN



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JAMES SANFORD ELLSWORTH

1802 - 1873

JAMES SANFORD ELLSWORTH, the Connecticut miniature painter, son of John Ellsworth, one of the officers in charge of the State House for many years, was born in Windsor early in 1802. He first displayed a taste for art by making several copies in oils of one of Gilbert Stuart's full-length portraits of Washington, one of which is still preserved in the Wadsworth Athenaeum at Hartford. He lived for a number of years in Hartford on Trumbull Street, and married Mary Ann Driggs of that city, May 23, 1830. He was an eccentric young man and kept himself generally aloof from society, his chief diversion being the reading and study of Shakespeare's plays. His marriage proved unhappy and soon thereafter, possibly in a year or two, he departed from Hartford without warning for the West. There he appeared first in Saint Louis where he painted a picture called "A Wounded Grecian Racer," which created much comment. It was regarded by artists as "a wild conception, good in color, fine in drawing and altogether praiseworthy." Mr. H. W. French in his "Art and Artists of Connecticut" says that too much Shakespeare and his unhappy marriage had made him mad before he departed unceremoniously from his home. This, I think, is very doubtful, if not exactly untrue. The facts of the case are that the best of his miniatures were probably all

done subsequently — after 1835. They could hardly have been painted by any other than a sane and very competent portrait draughtsman. He returned to Connecticut sometime between 1835 and 1840. Mr. French adds that "he reappeared in the role of a weather-beaten wanderer, followed by an old dog, which he said, was his only friend on earth." However, he continued to paint his quaint and charming portrait miniatures in towns widely separated about the state and in Berkshire and Hampden Counties, Massachusetts, for many years thereafter. I venture the surmise that he had hardly the appearance of a demented tramp, as French suggests, though there may be some truth in his story of the artist stopping at a farmhouse near Hartford and offering to paint the family in exchange for food and old clothes. In his old age Ellsworth moved finally to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, where he died in an almshouse in 1873 or 1874.

II

The earliest of Ellsworth's miniatures known to me are those of Mr. and Mrs. Rufus Winthrop and their three children (Figs. 1, 2, 3 and 4) which were painted, if I am not mistaken, in the early "twenties," before he went West. All but that of the little boy (a unique example in full-face not reproduced here) reveal certain peculiarities that became characteristic of his style, notably the stiff, erect attitude noticeable in all his miniatures and the custom of painting his sitters in profile, which



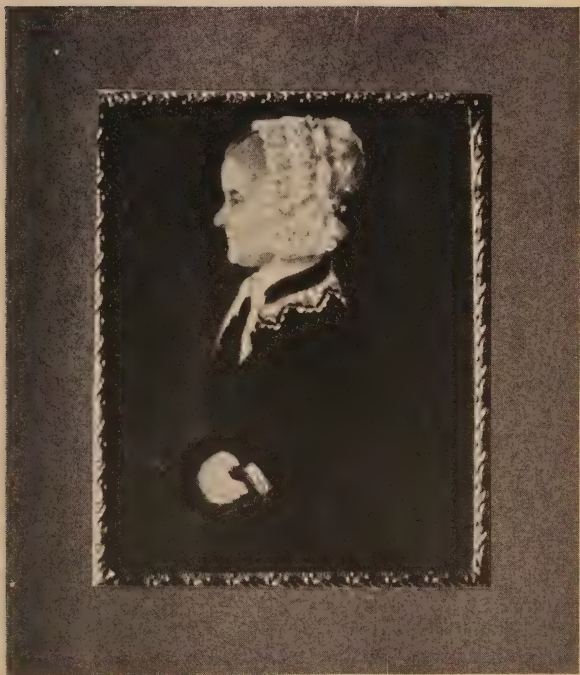
Nos. 3 AND 4. THE MISSES WINTHROP



No. 5. MRS. ENFIELD JOHNSTON



No. 6. UNIDENTIFIED ELDERLY LADY



No. 7. MRS. JENNIE POST



Nos. 8 AND 9. MR. AND MRS. MARCUM

he adhered to practically without exception to the end of his life. It would seem that he must have had some definite reason for believing, from the opinions expressed by early patrons that he had a particular gift for profile drawing, and that he therefore based his portraiture permanently on this manner of representation, which had first found favor with others. It is also very probable that the beginnings of his art had to do with the cutting of silhouettes in his boyhood and early youth.

The likeness of Mrs. Enfield Johnston (Fig. 5), who was the first white woman married in the State of Kentucky, is the next in chronological sequence of his works known to me, as it is also the only miniature from his hand on ivory that I have ever seen. It must have been painted in the early "thirties" and proves very conclusively that while he was in the West he travelled about considerably in the pursuit of his art, just as he did later in the East, for this miniature was painted in Louisville, Kentucky, at that period a considerable journey from Saint Louis.

It was immediately after his return from the West to his native state that the best of his miniatures were produced. He had improved immensely and the improvement is noted especially in the modelling in the faces and adds a new interest to his portraiture during the next few years. His drawing also is more assured and meticulous in its attention to minute detail, as noticeable in the lace caps and collars of his women. He is also freer and surer in his use of color as evidenced in

the flesh tones and in the dress of his sitters. Browns, a rich blue and yellow and other hues appear.

The miniatures of Mrs. Jennie Post of Guilford, Conn. (Fig. 7), and that of the unknown elderly lady (Fig. 6) are of this period, and probably date from about 1835. They are the finest of his miniatures that I have encountered.

After 1840 he invented an altogether personal style of representation, in which the sitter is shown seated in a chair, the individual characteristics of which are found in the quaint but ugly Victorian chairs and a conventional, cloud-like background for the heads, shaped like a clover leaf. It is a curious but engaging and entirely unique scheme for portrait miniatures. The examples of this type include the Marcums (Fig. 8 and 9) of Litchfield, Conn., painted in New Boston, Mass., and those of the unidentified couple (Figs. 10 and 11). The latter are both signed and dated "March 12th 1852," which leads me to believe that all of his miniatures of this type date from about 1840 to 1860. If further proof of this were necessary it is to be found in an examination of the Treat and Baird-Rudd likenesses, numbers 16 to 19 inclusive, of the list printed herewith. The Baird-Rudd miniatures are perhaps the finest of this period, and the Miss Nye (No. 20 of the list) is certainly the quaintest and most intriguing — a little girl of twelve or thirteen holding a bouquet of flowers. The drawing and modelling of these late miniatures, painted after the artist was forty, is as fine

as in those of his best period, ten or fifteen years earlier.

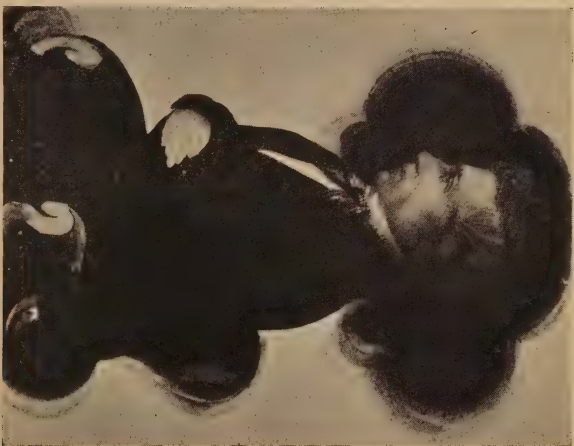
III

If I am not mistaken Ellsworth was entirely self-taught, his art an outgrowth of an early aptitude in the cutting of silhouettes. While he was certainly not a great miniaturist in any sense, his work was unique in its individuality. Historically it preserves in a remarkable degree the spirit of its time — prim New England women with their quaint and lovely lace collars and caps, men in their “Sunday” black, with black stocks and the curious and ugly Victorian furniture. Little things like the wart below Mr. Marcum’s ear (Fig. 9) are evidence that the artist was very literal and painstaking in his portraiture, and something of a “realist.”

MINIATURES

BY JAMES SANFORD ELLSWORTH

- 1 & 2 MR. AND MRS. RUFUS WINTHROP. On thin paper. Each about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide.
Private Collection, South Glastonbury, Conn.
- 3 & 4 THE MISSES WINTHROP. On thin paper. Each about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide.
Private Collection, South Glastonbury, Conn.
- 5 MASTER WINTHROP. On thin paper. 4 inches high by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. (Painted full-face).
Private Collection, South Glastonbury, Conn.
The Winthrops were residents of Southington or Stonington, Connecticut. These miniatures were published January, 1925, in "Antiques."
- 6 MRS. ENFIELD JOHNSTON. Irregular ivory panel. $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches high by $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches wide. Mrs. Johnston was a resident of Louisville, Kentucky, where this miniature was painted.
Private Collection, New York City
- 7 MRS. JENNIE POST. On thin paper. $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by 2 inches wide. Inscribed on the back "Painted by J. S. Ellsworth." Mrs. Post was a resident of Guilford, Connecticut, where this miniature was found.
Private Collection, New York City
- 8 UNIDENTIFIED ELDERLY LADY. Oval. On thin paper. $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches high by $2\frac{1}{8}$ inches wide.
Private Collection, New York City
- 9 & 10 MR. AND MRS. MARCUM. On thin paper. The former, $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches high by 3 inches wide; the latter, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches wide. An inscription on the board at the back of the latter reads, "J. S. Ellsworth, Painter, Westfield." (Hampden County, Massachusetts).
Private Collection, Westport, Conn.



Nos. 10 AND 11. UNIDENTIFIED GENTLEMAN AND HIS WIFE

- 11 & 12 UNIDENTIFIED GENTLEMAN AND HIS WIFE. On thin paper. Each $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches high by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. Signed and dated on the back "J. S. Ellsworth, Painter, March 12th 1852." Found in New London, Conn.
Private Collection, Westport, Conn.
- 13 UNIDENTIFIED LADY. On thin paper. About $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide.
Private Collection, Sheffield, Mass.
- 14 LUCINDA WILSON BUSHNELL. (Died March 23, 1861. Aged 86). On thin paper. About $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by 3 inches wide.
Private Collection, Sheffield, Mass.
- 15 MRS. ELLSWORTH. (Sister of Lucinda Wilson Bushnell). On thin paper. About $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by 3 inches wide.
Private Collection, Sheffield, Mass.
- 16 ELLEN H. TREAT. (Cousin of James A. Bushnell. Died October 7, 1869. Aged 33). On thin paper. About $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by 3 inches wide. Probably painted about 1854.
Private Collection, Sheffield, Mass.
- 17 MARCIA TREAT. (Sister of Ellen H. Treat. Died February 28, 1851. Aged 20). On thin paper. About $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by 3 inches wide. Painted about 1850.
Private Collection, Sheffield, Mass.
- 18 DEBORAH BAIRD. (Born February 9, 1804. Married Ebenezer Rudd of Becket, Massachusetts, her home). On thin paper. $3\frac{1}{8}$ inches high by $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide. Painted about 1850.
Private Collection, Lee, Mass.
- 19 EBENEZER RUDD. (Husband of Deborah Baird. Born February 22, 1805. Died Becket, Massachusetts, March 31, 1892). On thin paper. $3\frac{1}{8}$ inches high by $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide.
Private Collection, Lee, Mass.
- 20 MISS NYE. On thin paper. $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches high by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. Pictured as a child of twelve or thirteen years.
Private Collection, Lee, Mass.

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